



British Columbia's
Office of the Human Rights
Commissioner

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Commissioner releases statement on toxic drug crisis, calls on government to put politics aside to save lives

Vancouver B.C. – Today, B.C.'s Human Rights Commissioner, Kasari Govender, released a position statement on the human rights impacts of the toxic drug crisis, emphasizing the need to place evidence-based recommendations above stigma when navigating this public health emergency.

Titled *A Human Rights Approach to the Toxic Drug Crisis*, the position statement makes the case that government's failure to address the crisis with evidence-based actions—and its focus on criminal justice responses and involuntary care—is due largely to stigma.

"Treating people who use drugs as if their health issues are moral failings is a violation of their human rights," said Commissioner Govender. "Any other health problem with such a significant fatality rate would be treated with the utmost urgency, as we saw during the COVID-19 pandemic."

Unregulated drug toxicity is now the leading cause of death in B.C. for people aged 19 to 59. As of September 2025, the number of unregulated drug deaths was equal to 5.3 deaths per day.

"Much like alcohol in the 1910s, the toxic drug crisis occurs in a prohibition model, making it clear that the crisis is not the result of safer supply policies, but rather the result of making drugs illegal," said the Commissioner.

The position statement outlines how numerous studies show harm reduction and safe supply approaches reduce deaths and serious harm flowing from the toxic drug crisis. The Commissioner argues that while these approaches might not be politically popular, the important thing is that they are effective in saving lives and respecting the human rights of people who use drugs.

"B.C.'s leading experts have been issuing clear, evidence-based recommendations for a decade, and yet the provincial government has acted in contradiction of those recommendations at the expense of public health in our province. As Commissioner, I support their calls to action," Govender stated.

The toxic drug crisis affects hundreds of thousands of people, including both those who are unhoused and those who are stably housed and both casual or infrequent drug users and those who may have a substance use disorder. An estimated 225,000 people use illicit drugs in B.C. and are at risk due to the increasing toxicity of the drug supply over the past decade combined with inadequate social policy.

“Compassion for those who have died—and those who loved them—must remain at the centre of decision making,” said Govender. “A compassionate approach requires embracing scientific evidence over political ideology and making every possible effort to save lives.”

The Commissioner’s full statement is available at bchumanrights.ca/toxic-drug-crisis.

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Media contact

To request an interview with Commissioner Kasari Govender, please contact media@bchumanrights.ca.

Media kit

[Visit our media kit](#) for images of Commissioner Kasari Govender, pronunciation guidance, bios and more.

About BCOHRC

BC’s Office of the Human Rights Commissioner exists to address the root causes of inequality, discrimination and injustice in B.C. by shifting laws, policies, practices and cultures. We do this work through education, research, advocacy, inquiry and monitoring. Learn more at: bchumanrights.ca

About the Commissioner

Kasari Govender began her work as B.C.’s first independent human rights commissioner in September 2019. As an independent officer of the Legislature, Commissioner Govender is uniquely positioned to ensure human rights in B.C. are protected, respected and advanced on a systemic level. In her first five-year term, her work through BC’s Office of the Human Rights Commissioner included a public inquiry into experiences of hate in the pandemic, a report on systemic discrimination in policing, community embedded research about a range of human rights issues experienced by British Columbians, public awareness campaigns about ableism and racism and guidance to government that, among other things, informed the creation of both the *Anti-Racism Data Act* and the *Anti-Racism Act*. Commissioner Govender was reappointed for a second term beginning in September 2024.

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